

## THE SEAMLESS GARMENT

The Mementos of Christ's Passion: an alabaster jar, thirty silver coins, a crown of thorns, and an old rugged cross. And tonight, the fifth memento; that seamless garment described in John 19:23-24. **“When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. ‘Let’s not tear it,’ they said to one another. ‘Let’s decide by lot who will get it.’ This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled which said, ‘They divided My garments among them and cast lots for My clothing.’ So this is what the soldiers did.”**

Two types of clothing are mentioned in this text. First, the outerwear or HIMATIA in Greek, which included accessories like a cloak, belt, sandals, and prayer shawl. These were likely the four items divided into four shares among the four soldiers who crucified Jesus. While we need no historical confirmation to accept the truthfulness of Scripture; the mention of four soldiers and four shares merely underscores the historicity of Scripture. We know from many secular, historical, and archaeological sources that Romans soldiers assigned to crucifixions generally worked in teams of four.

Then the undergarment or CHITON in Greek; a tunic worn next to the skin, usually knee-length and with long sleeves. The CHITON of Jesus was especially remarkable in that it was not sewn together from individual pieces of cloth;

but was rather woven entirely as one piece, no seams from top to bottom.

Who made this CHITON or seamless garment for the Lord? His mother Mary? A woman whose disease Jesus had cured or whose child He had raised from the dead or whose marriage He had saved? Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons? Mary and Martha of Bethany, whose brother Lazarus Jesus had called from the grave? Peter's mother-in-law, whom Jesus had healed of a serious fever? The possibilities are as countless as Christ's miracles.

Yet, Scripture does not tell us who made the seamless garment, or for that matter, which Roman soldier won it by lottery, or what that soldier did with the garment he won. According to one legend, the lucky soldier who obtained the seamless garment sold it to a traveling salesman. To this day, several Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches claim to have this seamless garment of Christ in their possession. Such nonsense aside, what may we learn from this CHITON, this memento of Christ's Passion? Of what does this seamless garment remind us?

**First, that seamless garment is a symbol of Christ's humility;** that is, the extent to which Jesus humbled Himself for our sakes. And we can't begin to contemplate the extent of that humility without remembering that Jesus was not only true Man but also true God from all eternity.

This is why Paul in that great passage from Philippians 2 wrote of Christ's deity *before* describing His humility; saying, **“Christ Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And**

**being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.”**

How does that seamless garment underscore Christ’s humility? Consider the fact that Jesus was even wearing this CHITON at all; a simple, lovingly made, homespun garment; the fact that He was not wearing divine garments so bright with glory as to blind the eyes of those who witnessed them.

Remember the description of Christ’s clothes at His transfiguration, when for a brief instant He allowed Peter and Andrew, James and John, to glimpse His true glory? According to Mark 9:3, **“His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”** And in Luke 9:29, **“As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”** No, Jesus wasn’t wearing such clothes when crucified, though He could have. He came to be our everyday Savior, and so He wore everyday clothes.

Clothes which He allowed the Roman soldiers to take away, including that special seamless garment. And this too emphasizes His humility; the fact that Jesus permitted His clothes to be divided among Roman legionnaires and His seamless undergarment to be assigned by lottery—He, of whom John wrote in the Prologue of his Gospel, **“Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made,”** John 1:3.

**“When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes,”** John 19:23. Do we pause long enough at this verse to consider its implications? Many Christians don’t realize this. Understandably, most Christian art does not depict this.

But when Jesus Christ hung bleeding and dying on the cross, He was almost certainly naked. And so even this shame was added to His agony; a shame He willingly endured when humbly atoning for our sins. Of this humility the seamless garment is a reminder.

**Second, that seamless garment is a symbol of Christ's love.** This is because any discussion of Christ's humility will lead to a heartfelt praise for Christ's undeserved love. "Why would Jesus so humble Himself? Why would He think of us before thinking about Himself? Why would He choose to be born in a smelly barn instead of a royal palace? Why would He allow Himself to be arrested, mocked, scourged, wrongly condemned, so savagely beaten as to be unrecognizable?"

This is the plain meaning of Isaiah's words written centuries before Christ's birth: "**Just as there were many who were appalled at Him—His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and His form marred beyond human likeness,**" Isaiah 52:14. And why would Jesus permit Roman soldiers to divide His clothes among themselves; to roll dice or flip coins for that special, seamless tunic that someone had lovingly made Him? Why would He willingly die the excruciating death of the cross?

There is only one answer to all these questions, and that one answer is divine, unmerited love. As explained in the cherished words of John 3:16-17, "**For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.**" Love. The Greek word AGAPE. The love that took into account

everything wrong with us and went on loving us anyway. Love that moved Jesus to lay down His life for us and literally ‘give us the tunic off His back.’ God’s love. Of this love the seamless garment is a reminder.

**Third, that seamless garment is a symbol of God’s absolute faithfulness.** Note carefully the words of John 19:24, **“This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled which said, ‘They divided My garments among them and cast lots for My clothing.’ ”** Do you know who wrote these words? King David. Do you know where these words are found? In Psalm 22, a psalm which prophetically describes the crucifixion of Jesus Christ—and in such detail as to mention the Savior’s pierced hands and feet, His dislocated bones, and the dreadful words He would cry from the cross: **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”** Psalm 22:1. And do you know when this psalm was written? Nearly a thousand years before Christ was even born.

In fact, throughout the Passion History we find similar affirmations of God’s faithfulness: ‘This happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.’ When betrayed in Gethsemane, Jesus said, **“Do you think I cannot call on My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?”** Matthew 26:53-54.

When speaking of the betrayer, Judas, Jesus said, **“None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled,”** John 17:12. Of Judas and his thirty silver coins we read: **“Then what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ‘They took the**

**thirty silver coins, the price set on Him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me,"** Matthew 27:9-10.

Of words Jesus spoke from the cross we read: **"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty,' "** John 19:28. And of the fact that the bones of Jesus were not broken as He hung on the cross we read: **"These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of His bones will be broken;' and, as another Scripture says, 'They will look on the One they have pierced,'"** John 19:36-37.

Why am I offering so many examples? Because when you leave here tonight, I want you to be certain that our God keeps His Word; our God keeps His promises—every sentence, every word, every letter. And that includes every promise He has ever made to you. The promise to love you eternally and unconditionally. The promise to deliver you in times of trouble. The promise to forgive your sins when you turn to Him in repentance and faith. The promise to provide for all your daily needs. The promise to bring you safely from grace to glory, from time to eternity. from this life to the next. Of this faithfulness the seamless garment is a reminder.

**Fourth, that seamless garment is a symbol of God's complete control.** The Roman soldiers, of course, thought that they were in control when they nailed Christ to the cross. They thought their goddess Fortuna or Lady Luck was in control when they rolled the dice for that seamless garment. Just as the High Priest Caiaphas thought he was in control when he delivered Jesus to Pilate; and Pilate thought

he was in control when He sentenced Jesus to be crucified; and Tiberius Caesar thought he was in control when he appointed Pontius Pilate to be Prefect of Judea.

Yet, that which happened to Jesus during His passion, from His betrayal to His arrest, from His death on the cross to the dividing of his garments by four Roman soldiers, was not coincidence, not accident, not in the control of mortal men, but the result of the eternal plans and purposes of Almighty God. As explained so simply in the last verse of tonight's text: **“So this is what the soldiers did.”** Why did they do it? Because God ordained it. Because God used even the hostile intensions of the Jewish religious leaders, the wicked power of imperial Rome, and even the unjust condemnation and crucifixion of His one and only Son, to accomplish the salvation of the world.

No matter what the circumstances—whether ill that results from our own foolish choices or illness that comes through no fault of our own—God is always Sovereign. God is always in control, God is always working out everything and every detail in accordance with His will and His grand and glorious purposes for our lives. **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him,”** Romans 8:28. This is the resounding testimony of the Bible. And of this gracious control and sovereignty that seamless garment is a reminder.

**Finally, that seamless garment is a symbol of Christ's righteousness.** The images are heartbreaking. Jesus, nearly beaten beyond recognition, bleeding profusely, nailed to a cross. Jesus, crowned with thorns, a mocking superscription placed above His head as if it were a FOR SALE or UNWANTED sign and reading: JESUS OF

NAZARETH. KING OF THE JEWS. Jesus, gasping for each breath; yet, still speaking words of blessing and benediction: **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,”** Luke 23:34. Jesus, suffering in ways we simply cannot fathom; for along with the physical torture He endured, He was also carrying the weight and guilt of the world’s sins. **“And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,”** Isaiah 53:6. Jesus, enduring the indignity of hanging naked from the cross, even as Roman soldiers divided His clothes and cast lots for that seamless garment; laughing, cursing, bartering.

But here, on Golgotha, there is another picture; another garden, another tree of life—amazingly, an old rugged cross—where our Savior, Jesus Christ, atoned for our sins. In Eden, Mankind was overcome by a tree. On Golgotha, Jesus Christ, overcame by a tree. In Eden, cursed the earth with thorns. On Golgotha, Jesus wore a crown of thorns. In Eden, Adam and Eve ran from God because of their shameful nakedness. On Golgotha, Jesus took our shameful nakedness and gave us the seamless garment of His righteousness. For **“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God,”** 2 Corinthians 5:10. And of this everlasting robe of righteousness from Christ, that seamless garment is a reminder.

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.  
On Christ, the solid rock I stand.  
All other ground is sinking sand.